



SOMRA

# Intellectual Output 1

## Executive Summary

Finland



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**The SOMRA project** - Supporting meaningful Occupations for Migrants, Refugees, and Asylum seekers - offers an innovative approach to tackling climate change and refugee crises, by engaging refugees, asylum seekers and migrants (MRAs) in meaningful occupations that transform them into environment role models with a sustainable impact in their new and previous home.

To achieve this, the SOMRA project will facilitate:



Findings for the holistic study report were collected via desk and infield research – interviews with MRA groups, professionals working with MRAs and NGO (non-governmental organisations) representatives.

This publication is the result of a study focusing on the analysis of NGO structures supporting immigrants and Green Sector NGOs. The main goal was to identify and share best practices for improving labour market integration among migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers (MRA) by involving them in Green NGOs and the Green Jobs sector.

## NGOs in Finland

Currently, there are around 130,000 registered associations in Finland (Finnish Patent and Registration Office, 2019) and up to 80% of the population belong to at least one of these associations. Finnish Patent And Registration Office is the registration body and information service that provides access to register information on associations, religious communities and chambers of commerce.

Registered associations are not established for the purpose of carrying on economic activity but to operate on a non-profit basis. In Finland, freedom of association also applies to foreigners, which is why there are many associations founded by immigrants. The association makes it possible to cooperate with authorities and other organisations. You can search for different associations on the association network service of the Finnish Patent and Registration Office.

In Finland, there are many organisations working with MRA to support vulnerable people and environmental NGOs working on environmental issues, raising awareness of climate change and promoting sustainable development. Those organisations can create and participate in networks within and between sectors, e.g. the environmental sector, and at different levels of decision-making, from national to international. Different organisations with similar objectives can join the network.

## Main NGO networks in Finland

### **Startup Refugees**

Support the employment and entrepreneurship of newcomers

### **Moniheli: Network of Multicultural Associations**

Committed to promoting multiculturalism and equality

### **Union of Friendship Associations in Finland: Friendship associations**

Supports public recognition of international friendship associations

### **Faro-Finnish Association of Russian-speaking Organisations**

Support the integration of Russian-speaking people

## Migrants, Refugees and Asylum Seekers (MRAs) – Definitions

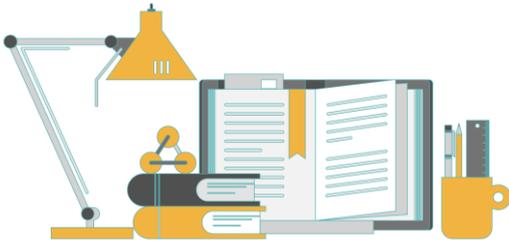
A person seeking asylum; is who flees their home, arrives in another country, whichever way they can, makes themselves known to the authorities, and submits an asylum application, has a legal right to stay in the country while waiting for a decision.

A refugee: has proven that they would be at risk if returned to their home country, has had their claim for asylum accepted by the government, has permission to stay in Finland either long term or indefinitely.

Short history of migration in Finland started to gain momentum in the 1990s, when Finland started to receive migrants arriving from Russia, Estonia, Somalia, Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, and Iraq. By 2015, the foreign-born accounted for over 6% of the Finnish population, and the native-born children of the foreign-born accounted for a further 1%. Even if those numbers are still low compared to other countries, Finland is still facing migrant-related challenges.

## Barriers for MRAs to set up an NGO

**Language.** Language learning (Finnish or Swedish, the second official language in Finland) is one of the most important goals of integration. The key role of language acquisition is crucial when it comes to finding a job. MRAs with low literacy skills in their own language has been found to have additional difficulties in acquiring the national language, which creates additional barriers and creates additional support needs.



**Qualifications.** The problem of qualifications should be considered in two ways: On the one hand, some have low professional qualifications, which is a barrier to finding work, and it is necessary to support this group and implement programs to enable them to acquire the necessary professional qualifications. In this area, one of the solutions proposed by the SOMRA project is to promote voluntary activities in the field of green jobs, through which migrants can acquire the necessary practice by learning "on the job" and adapting to the requirements of the market. On the other hand, there is the problem of the practice of "non-recognition" of foreign qualifications, which should now be the subject of systemic changes.



**Unclear rules for asylum seekers who want to set up an NGO or for migrants wanting to work in an already existing one.** Participants noted unclear rules on whether asylum seekers in Finland have the right to form an association. Civic activities and the third sector are also often politically tinged, immigrants may equate these as an alternative channel, undesirable in the eyes of the state, in which participation is perceived as negative for one's position.



**Poverty.** People belonging to the MRA group are relatively poor, financial problems translate into integration barriers and the resulting social problems resulting from exclusion.

Participants pointed to the high cost of living in Finland and high tuition fees for foreigners.

**Not enough help for women and children.** More individual support is needed to help women and children achieve good results in the integration process, there are barriers to access to help, although it is provided, it should be easier and more widely available.

These are examples of needs and gaps, the above and others should be the subject of social discourse and improvement.

## Right to work

**Migrants and refugees** right to work in Finland depends on where you travel from and what type of work you intend to do. Refugees are allowed to do any type of work including volunteering.

**Asylum seekers** are allowed to work for pay in Finland without a residence permit once three months have passed from the submission of your asylum application if you have a travel document entitling you to international travel. If you do not have such a document, you are allowed to work for pay in Finland without a residence permit once six months have passed from the submission of your asylum application.

Find more about migrant work in Finland: [www.migri.fi](http://www.migri.fi)

## Volunteering

Anyone, regardless of age, location, gender, race, or other characteristics, can volunteer according to their skills, schedules, and resources. Volunteering is not compensated in salary, but the work experience may come in handy when you apply for paid work. Volunteers can rely on induction and introduction to the activities of the organisation, often volunteers also can attend staff training. Another benefit is the certificate that confirms volunteering.

Volunteering is a great way to pave the way to success, especially for people with little work experience or insufficient language skills. Volunteering as a starting point for a professional career is a good way to enter professional life and improve language skills.

Volunteering opportunities in Finland:

<https://www.metsa.fi/en/about-us/cooperation/volunteer-work/>

<https://www.metsa.fi/en/about-us/cooperation/volunteer-work/>

<https://www.sll.fi/tule-mukaan/vapaaehtoiseksi/>

<https://www.greenpeace.org/finland/vapaaehtoiset/>

## Conclusion

It is especially important to develop integration as an individual process that considers a person's particular circumstances, such as their background and career plans.

Unemployment among immigrants is cited as one of the most important issues to be addressed. These rates are still high among immigrants in Finland and vary according to nationality, e.g. the unemployment rate for Estonians was 17%, for Russians 41% and for Somalis as high as 73% in 2014.

Labour market position is a key indicator of social status, and employment is, therefore, the basis for the successful integration of immigrants. An efficient integration process determines the accumulation of human, social and cultural capital after immigration, so it is crucial to constantly monitor and implement migration policy solutions.

